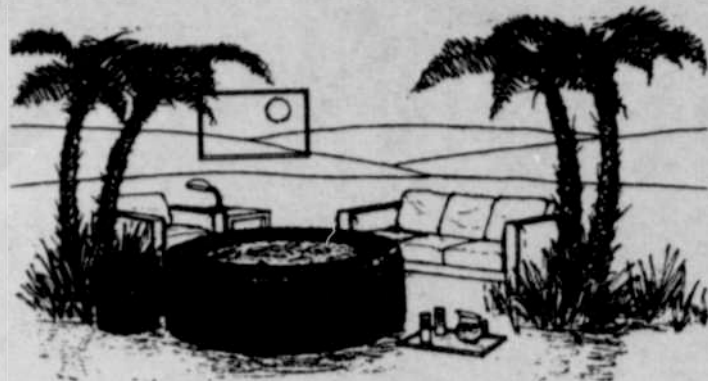


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A time of death

The Origin of the Pink Triangle

BY TERRY BOUGHNER, Ph.D.

Editor's note: Today, we are faced with the neo-nazis. This isn't really a new threat, nor is the hatred, prejudice and bigotry which spawns such filth. It has always been there—a ravening, slaving beast, ready to come out from where it has been hiding and gathering strength. Needing only enough fear or indifference to give it another foothold. We are the scape goats—again. Gay-bashing is a popular sport. Thanks to our government, we are once more termed deviants.

The following begins a series of stories, related to author Terry Boughner by a few gay survivors of the Nazi prison camps. It tells, also, of the beginnings of the Pink Triangle, which we now wear with such pride.

Read them. Feel them. Learn from them. But don't ever forget them.



Author's introduction

This is not a pretty story. For those who think that the more bloody parts of history should be sanitized, read no further. The Holocaust of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis has been described in countless volumes of prose and poetry. This is not to mention the museums and memorials to the victims that exist in the United States, Europe and Israel.

But the Jews were not the only ones marked out for genocide. There were millions of others, and among these others were gays. Until very recently, there were no memorials of any kind commemorating the gay Holocaust. Gays were mentioned only in passing, or if some incident was so terrible, so brutal, it couldn't go unnoticed.

Much of this has been by design. According

to Ira Glasser, head of the American Civil Liberties Union, in the September 10, 1975 issue of The New York Times, "the pink triangle . . . lies buried as a virtual historical secret." Glasser went on to say that "During World War II, no king, no premier, no president, no prominent citizen came forward wearing a pink triangle, as it is said the yellow Star of David was worn by the King of Denmark." He might have added that afterward, for all our sufferings, we received no recompense of any kind. No one mourned our losses or raised tear-filled and haunted eyes to commemorate our dead. We were outlaws before and so we remained.

Raul Hilberg, author of *The Destruction of the European Jews* and a former member of the President's Commission on the Holocaust, was quoted in the December 10, 1979 issue of the New York Village Voice as being opposed to including gays in any memorialization of Holocaust victims. "That would be a travesty," Hilberg said, implying that any mention of gays would somehow detract from the blood sacrifice of the Jews. That gays were not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with those who had been driven to the gas chamber for their faith, whether Jewish or Christian.

Eugen Kogon, a highly respected authority on the Holocaust, himself interned at Buchenwald and author of *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, states uncategorically that "The fate of the homosexuals in the concentration camps can only be described as ghastly."

We shall see that the mechanisms of genocide were set up to murder us. Gays were the first. The context for the story of the Pink Triangle has been easy enough to dig out. Finding gay survivors who were willing to talk was much more difficult. Remember, they were criminals before the war and remained criminals afterward. The German law (175) under which gays were persecuted by the Nazis remained on the books until 1969. Even when it was finally removed, the prejudice and hatred remained. These victims had no reason to trust anybody.

These people had been through hideous experiences, the pain of which would remain with them for the rest of their lives. It was a terrible thing for them to bring back all the old memories of incredible suffering. I am convinced that the only reason that they did so was because I was gay, one of their own, as one put it and they believed that I would tell their stories with sympathy.

Finding these people and interviewing them was a process which took over 10 years (1970-1980) and numerous trips to Europe. It was largely in the nature of a chain reaction. I met one who, in turn, introduced me to friends and so on.

In pursuing this story, I lost my objectivity and closely and emotionally identified with my subjects. I can frankly state that never before nor since have I felt so drained, so full of sorrow and anger—and so very gay.

It was in the nature of a personal quest to find out as best I could, what had happened to those who were existing as I am, in a society determined to extinguish them.

I am not satisfied even now that I can in any but a small way comprehend why it happened or the enormity of it. That's why I have waited to write, hoping some insight would come. This hasn't happened, but I have come to understand the obsessive need and determination of Jewish writers to get the story out, hoping against hope that it might never happen again. I am not optimistic. The Nazis were, after all, not a German phenomenon, but a human phenomenon.

I cannot say that you will enjoy these stories. I don't think that you will. But I want you to know about them and I hope that I can make you see through my words, the terrifying reality behind the Pink Triangle which has haunted me for nearly 20 years.

THE STORY OF HANS

1933:

Nazis begin killing "filthy queers" in brutal, hideous ways

His name was Hans. I first met him in a gay bar in Munich that summer of 1970. It was early, the bar was nearly empty, so I ordered a beer and settled in.

I don't remember him coming in. All I can recall now is the feeling of regret at someone slipping heavily onto the stool beside me. Why, I asked myself, with almost every other place empty, did he have to sit right beside me?

I couldn't help glancing over as he ordered. He looked to be in his late 60s or early 70s. I later learned that I'd overestimated his age by about 15 years. I remember his high, shiny forehead with its few strands of white hair and his broad face with the scar, running lightning-shaped down one deeply lined cheek. I remember his fingers, long, thin, but gnarled and twisted as if they had been broken and not set right.

He took a sip of his drink and then turned and asked in German, "You are American, yes?"

I nodded, with a look which I hoped said that's as far as I wanted the conversation to go, but then he asked, "You have been to Dachau?"

The question took me by surprise. Just that day I had indeed visited the former Nazi concentration camp located about 12 miles outside the city and kept there by the wartime four great powers as a memorial to Holocaust victims.

In the commandant's headquarters—now a museum—I'd stood looking at pictures, done in a series, of a young man being frozen to death; one of the so-called medical experiments done by demented doctors of Hitler's Third Reich.